

Asperger Syndrome Children And Tantrums

By Nelle Frances Children with Asperger's Syndrome the world over share a common trait – meltdown – otherwise known as a tantrum, a “birko”, a “go-off” or “spack-attack”.

The visible symptoms of meltdown are as varied as the Asperger children themselves, but every parent is able to describe their child's meltdown behaviour in intricate detail.

Meltdowns can be short lived, or last as long as two hours. They can be as infrequent as once a month (often coinciding with the lunar cycle/full moon) or occur as frequently as 4-6 times a day.

Whatever the frequency and duration, an Asperger child having a meltdown is difficult for parents/carers/teachers to deal with.

Meltdown in Asperger children is triggered by a response to their environment. These responses can be caused by avoidance desire, anxiety or sensory overload. Triggers need to be recognised and identified.

So how do we deal with a meltdown? What should you do when meltdown occurs?

An adults' (parents/carers/teachers) behaviour can influence a meltdown's duration, so always check your response first.

1. Calm down
2. Quiet down
3. Slow down
4. Prioritise safety
5. Re-establish self-control in the child, then deal with the issue

1. Take 3 slow, deep breaths, and rather than dreading the meltdown that's about to take place, assure yourself that you've survived meltdowns 1000 times before and will do so this time too.

2. Keep your speaking voice quiet and your tone neutrally pleasant. Don't speak unnecessarily. Less is best. Don't be “baited” into an argument. (Often Asperger children seem to “want” to fight. They know how to “push your buttons”, so don't be side-tracked from the meltdown issue).

3. Slow down. Meltdown often occurs at the most inconvenient time e.g. rushing out the door to school. The extra pressure the fear of being late creates, adds to the stress of the situation. (Asperger children respond to referred mood and will pick up on your stress. This stress is then added to their own.) So forget the clock and focus on the situation. Make sure the significant people in your life know your priorities here. Let your boss know that your Asperger child has meltdowns that have the capacity to bring life to a standstill, and you may be late. Let your child's teacher know that if your child is late due to a meltdown that it's unavoidable, and your child shouldn't be reprimanded for it.

4. Prioritise safety when your Asperger child is having a meltdown. Understand that they can be extremely impulsive and irrational at this time. Don't presume that the safety rules they know will be utilized while they're melting down. Just because your Asperger child knows not to go near the street when they are calm doesn't mean they won't run straight into 4 lanes of traffic when they are having a meltdown. If your Asperger child starts melting down when you're driving in the car, pull over and stop. If your child tends to “flee” when melting down, don't chase them. This just adds more danger to the situation. Tail them at a safe distance (maintain visual contact) if necessary.

5. When your Asperger child is calm and has regained self-control, he will often be exhausted. Keep that in mind as you work through the meltdown issue. Reinforce to your child the appropriate way to express their needs/requests.

Remember that all behaviour is a form of communication, so try to work out the ‘message’ your Asperger child is trying to convey with their meltdown, rather than responding and reacting to the behaviour displayed.

About the Author

Nelle Frances is the mother of a 15 year old with Asperger's Syndrome, a Special Needs Educator and Author of the Ben and His Helmet series of books for Asperger children. She is also an active member of 5 Asperger's Syndrome Support and Advocacy Groups. For more information and Support Strategies visit <http://www.nellefrances.com>.

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